
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	2111 Florida Avenue, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Friends Meeting House/ Sheridan-Kalorama Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	September 18, 2014	X	Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	14-529	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		New Construction
			Demolition
			Subdivision

Architect Evan Lippincott (Lippincott Architects), representing the Washington Friends Meeting, seeks conceptual design review for construction of a two-story entrance foyer, elevator and corridor to provide accessibility to several adjacent but unconnected buildings owned and operated by the Friends.

Property History and Description

The Friends Meeting House occupies a triangular-shaped lot fronting Florida Avenue and bounded on Phelps Place to the north and Decatur Place to the south. The two-story, gable-roofed Colonial Revival building is decorated with Georgian and Federal elements and clad in Pennsylvania Foxcroft stone. The original portion of the building was constructed in 1930, designed by architect Walter Ferris Price; an extremely harmonious, virtually seamless addition was added in 1950 designed by Washington architect Leon Chatelain, Jr.

The Washington Friends Meeting House, a landmark listed the National Register, is significant for its architecture and history. The primary motivation for constructing the building was to provide services for President and Mrs. Herbert Hoover, the first Quaker elected president of the United States and who lived nearby in the Sheridan-Kalorama neighborhood. The building is also a fine representation of a traditional American Quaker meeting house design by Price, a prolific Philadelphia architect who was recognized as an authority on Quaker architecture. The sources for his design, which are well documented, come from meeting houses in the Philadelphia area and England.

The property also includes 2121 Decatur Place, a 1923 Federal revival townhouse and associated two-story garage. Acquired by the Friends in 1970 and since converted for use as classrooms and child care facilities, these buildings were not historically associated with the meeting house. As such, they are contributing buildings to the Sheridan-Kalorama Historic District but are not part of the landmark. The former rear yard of the townhouse and garage serve as a courtyard garden for the complex of buildings.

Proposal

The project calls for constructing a two-story glass foyer addition facing Decatur Place between the side of the meeting house's 1950s addition and the former garage building associated with 2121 Decatur. The foyer would house a stair and an elevator clad in stone to match the meeting house, and provide access to the rear courtyard garden, to the meeting house and to a two-story hallway that would connect along the back of the garage and 2121; the hallway would ramp up as it extended west to provide access to the varied levels. On the second floor, the roof of the hallway connector would intersect with the backside of the gable roof of the garage and retain the existing dormers. One stone gate post (associated historically with the meeting house addition) and four brick gate posts (associated with 2121) would be removed to allow for a unified, regraded entrance court.

Evaluation

Providing accessibility to this complex of buildings has been a goal studied and evaluated internally by the Washington Friends, and discussed with the HPO, for many years. It is a challenging issue to solve given the Friends' desire to minimize alterations to both the handsomely designed exterior and interior spaces of the meeting house and to provide access to the varied levels and small footprints of the other structures on the property.

From a preservation perspective, the proposal has the drawbacks of removing the prominent side-by-side gate posts and the hallway connector obscuring the rear elevations of the garage and townhouse, which provide an attractive backdrop to the property's interior courtyard gardens. However, these alterations have to be weighed against the advantages of the new construction being largely transparent and minimally invasive to the existing buildings. Existing exterior walls will be retained and exposed inside the new construction, door openings will be inserted through existing windows, and the existing roof form and dormers of the garage will be retained. As seen from the street, the new construction will retain the recess between the meeting house and the garage and allow views through to the courtyard garden.

At the suggestion of the HPO, the architect is studying an alternative scheme for cladding the elevator tower in copper or another metal rather than stone. The idea was suggested in order to provide a lighter structure that would be deferential but not compete with the unique materiality of the landmark church. Renderings of this alternative will be forwarded to the HPRB prior to the meeting.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the alterations and addition as compatible with the character of the landmark and the Sheridan Kalorama Historic District and delegate final approval to staff.